

State Senate Republicans elect new leadership

by Josh Kurtz

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ANNAPOLIS — The leadership of the Senate Republican caucus took a dramatic — but not altogether surprising — turn to the right Thursday when GOP senators elected a new minority leader and minority whip.

Sen. J. Lowell Stoltzfus (R-Dist. 38) of Marion Station, who had been minority whip, was unanimously elevated to the top post.

He will replace Sen. Martin G. Madden (R-Dist. 13) of Clarksville, who announced earlier this month that he would leave the Senate at the end of the year.

Sen. Larry E. Haines (R-Dist. 5) of Westminster was elected minority whip, defeating Sens. John J. Hafer (R-Dist. 1) of Frostburg, Andrew P. Har-

ris (R-Dist. 9) of Cockeysville and Alex X. Money (R-Dist. 3) of Frederick.

It is the most conservative Republican leadership team the state Senate has had in recent memory. The longtime Senate minority leader, John A. Cade, who died in 1996, got along so well with the Democrats that he became chairman of a key budget subcommittee.

His successors, F. Vernon Boozer — who was defeated by the more conservative Harris in a bitter 1998 GOP primary — and Madden were both moderates. Madden voted for gun control and gay rights bills in recent years.

With the defection of Sens. Robert R. Neall (D-Dist. 33) of Davidsonville and Patrick J. Hogan (D-Dist. 39) of Montgomery Village in recent years, along with the pending departure of Madden, the 13-member Republican caucus is now almost devoid of centrists.

Stoltzfus, a farmer and nursery operator who has been in the legislature for 11 years, is a rock-rib rural conservative.

But Haines, a real estate broker, has been one of Maryland's leading social conservatives since he entered the Senate in 1991 and is perhaps the legislature's most ardent anti-abortion voice.

In statements released by the Republican caucus, both Stoltzfus and Haines struck a conciliatory note toward Democrats, citing the national state of emergency as reason to focus on issues that are of greatest concern to Marylanders. But they both made it clear that the GOP caucus would pursue its agenda aggressively.

"These changing times ... dictate that Republican senators express our legitimate differences of opinion on matters of public policy, beginning with the state budget," Stoltzfus said. "Our role as fiscal watchdogs takes on added significance as a result of the terrorist attacks and a teetering national economy. It is long overdue that the state tighten its belt."